

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 069770

EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PAN

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH LOPEZ GUEVARA ON NEUTRALITY
TREATY

SUMMARY: GOP LEGAL ADVISER CARLOS LOPEZ GUEVARA REMARKED
TO MOSS DURING PANAMA-MIAMI FLIGHT MARCH 17 THAT NEUTRALITY
TREATY VOTE WAS A BITTER VICTORY FOR PANAMA, CAUSING NO
CELEBRATIONS. SAID BLOWUP WITH US OVER TREATY VERY NARROWLY
AVERTED. TORRIJOS DECIDED, ON MARCH 15, PUBLICLY TO ANNOUNCE
ON TELEVISION THAT DAY AT 1800 THAT PANAMA WOULD REJECT
TREATY IF DECONCINI RESERVATION ADOPTED. HE WAS DISSUADED
BY TREATY EXPERTS ROYO, ESCOBAR, LOPEZ GUEVARA AND "RORY
GONZALEZ" AND FURTHER PACIFIED BY TELEPHONE CALL FROM
PRESIDENT CARTER. DEEPLY DIVISIVE AND SOMETIMES EXPLOSIVE
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MEETINGS WITHIN INNER CIRCLE GOP CONTINUED MARCH 15-16.
FURTHER MEETINGS NEXT WEEK ARE EXPECTED TO RESULT IN DE-
CISION TO ACCEPT NEUTRALITY TREATY WITH RESERVATIONS. GOP
ATTITUDE WILL BE TOUGHER DURING REMAINDER OF RATIFICATION
PROCESS, AND GOP WILL PROBABLY ATTACH OWN "UNDERSTANDING"
ON NON-INTERVENTION.

1. LOPEZ GUEVARA SAID THAT TORRIJOS, FOLLOWING INAUGURATION OF SCHOOL IN COLON ON LATE MORNING OF MARCH 15, SET APPEARANCE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION AT 1800 IN WHICH HE PLANNED STRONGLY TO DENOUNCE ATTITUDE OF U.S. SENATE TOWARD PANAMA AND STATE IN ADVANCE HIS GOVERNMENT'S TOTAL REJECTION OF TREATY IF DECONCINI RESERVATION ADOPTED. MET AND DISCUSSED SITUATION WITH FOUR TREATY EXPERTS AND V.P. GERARDO GONZALEZ, LATTER BEING "HARD-LINE" ON ISSUE. ROYO AND LOPEZ GUEVARA DISSUADED TORRIJOS FROM IMMEDIATE ACTION. TELEPHONE CALL FROM PRESIDENT CARTER WAS MOST HELPFUL. LETTER FROM TORRIJOS TO PRESIDENT WAS THEN DRAFTED BY ESCOBAR AND LOPEZ GUEVARA (DELIVERED TO U.S. AMBASSADOR AFTERNOON OF MARCH 16).

2. NEAR-CRISIS WITHIN GOP CONTINUED MARCH 16 WITH LONG DISCUSSIONS WITHIN INNER CIRCLE AND THE "CLAN" (TORRIJOS FAMILY, OF WHICH LOPEZ GUEVARA A MEMBER). PARTICIPANTS AT TIMES NEARLY CAME TO BLOWS.

3. LAST HOURS OF SENATE DEBATE WERE PARTICULAR DISAPPOINTMENT BECAUSE OF INSULTING REMARKS DIRECTED AT PANAMA. PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS OF PRESIDENT CARTER VERY WELL RECEIVED, HOWEVER (AND PROMINENTLY PLAYED IN PANAMA PRESS MARCH 17). TELEVISION REMARKS OF ESCOBAR AFTER DEBATE WERE MORE CONCILIATORY AND UPBEAT THAN ATTITUDE REFLECTED BY TORRIJOS AND OTHER ADVISERS. THERE WAS NO CELEBRATING

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IN PANAMA, AND MOOD OF MOST OFFICIALS WAS ANGRY, FRUSTRATED AND TENSE.

4. SAID THAT AMBASSADOR GABRIEL LEWIS ON WAY TO PANAMA FOR COUNCIL OF STATE MEETING NEXT WEEK. TACIT ACCEPTANCE OF THE RESERVATIONS IS EXPECTED TO RESULT BUT TOUGHER GOP ATTITUDE WILL EMERGE, DESIGNED TO SERVE AS WARNING DURING SECOND TREATY DEBATE. ALSO, GOP EXPECTED TO ADD ITS OWN "UNDERSTANDING" BASED ON (AND TRACKING LANGUAGE OF) "NON-INTERVENTION" PORTIONS OF OCT. 14 STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING.

5. OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

-- FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALEZ REVILLA "VERY DIFFICULT" TO WORK WITH, TOTALLY UNLIKE AQUILINO BOYD WHO WAS HARD-WORKING, INTELLIGENT AND "STRAIGHT".

-- AMBASSADOR LEWIS VERY EFFECTIVE AND HAS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH WHITE HOUSE, ALTHOUGH IS "NERVOUS".

-- PROBLEM OF SECURITY FOR PANAMANIAN BONDS NOT RESOLVED

BECAUSE OF "PERSONALITY CLASH" (FON.MIN. V. BARLETTA).
RECOGNIZED THAT ONE SENATOR (FORD) WHO HAD BEEN "VERY
POSITIVE" WHILE IN PANAMA MAY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED NEGA-
TIVELY BY CONTINUATION OF THIS PROBLEM. L.G. OFFERED TO
HELP ON RETURN. VANCE

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